



From Rice to Work: How a Harvest Rite Became a Labor Holiday

Read the passage and answer the questions. (CEFR B1–B2)

Class _____ No. _____ Name _____

1 When Japan rewrote its national holidays in 1948, November 23 posed a delicate problem. For decades it had been Niinamesai, an imperial Shinto rite, but the new constitution separated religion from the state, and lawmakers said they had removed the colors of State Shinto from the new holidays. The challenge was to keep a beloved autumn day off while giving it a meaning that every citizen could share.



2 The Diet records show how hard that was. One proposal focused on production, including fishing and forestry, not only rice. Another simply called it Thanks Day, which critics found too vague. When the word kinro, meaning work or labor, was added, one member objected that thanking only workers might encourage class conflict.

3 The final law avoids that trap by asking citizens to thank one another. In this way, a ritual centered on one person offering rice became a holiday about mutual gratitude, though the ancient ceremony still continues quietly inside the palace on the same night. Today, many people enjoy the holiday without knowing its roots at all. For them, it is simply a quiet day off in late autumn, a chance to rest before the busy end of the year.

Comprehension

1. What is the main idea of the passage?

- (A) November 23 was copied from American Thanksgiving in 1948.
- (B) The emperor stopped the Niinamesai ceremony after the war.
- (C) Most Japanese people know the history of November 23 very well.
- (D) After a long debate, November 23 changed from a Shinto rite into a holiday about mutual thanks that everyone could share.

2. What did critics say about the name Thanks Day?

- (A) It was too religious.
- (B) It was too vague.
- (C) It was too long.
- (D) It only thanked farmers.

3. Why did one member object to adding the word kinro?

- (A) He thought it was hard to translate into English.
- (B) He wanted to keep the name Niinamesai.
- (C) He thought that thanking only workers might encourage class conflict.
- (D) He thought fishing and forestry were more important.

4. What can be inferred from the phrase "keep a beloved autumn day off"?

- (A) Many people valued the holiday, so lawmakers did not want to simply remove it.
- (B) Lawmakers wanted to create a brand-new holiday in spring.
- (C) Lawmakers thought autumn was too busy for a holiday.
- (D) The holiday was not popular before the war.

5. In paragraph 1, the word "delicate" in "posed a delicate problem" is closest in meaning to

- (A) easily broken, like glass
- (B) needing very careful handling
- (C) very small
- (D) not important

6. Why does the writer mention that many people enjoy the holiday without knowing its roots?

- (A) To explain why the date moved to November 23.
- (B) To criticize students for not studying history.
- (C) To argue that the holiday should be canceled.
- (D) To show that, for most people today, the holiday's religious origin is hardly visible.



Vocabulary, Paraphrase & Summary

Match the words with the definitions. Then rewrite and summarize.

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- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1. delicate | a. to say that you do not agree with something |
| 2. rite | b. a serious disagreement or fight between groups |
| 3. beloved | c. felt or done by each of two or more people toward the others |
| 4. proposal | d. needing careful handling because it could easily cause trouble |
| 5. vague | e. a traditional ceremony, often a religious one |
| 6. object | f. loved very much by many people |
| 7. conflict | g. a plan or idea that is formally suggested |
| 8. mutual | h. not clear or not exact in meaning |

Paraphrase — say it in your own words

1. “The challenge was to keep a beloved autumn day off while giving it a meaning that every citizen could share.”

Hint: Start with "The difficult part was" and use "at the same time".

2. “Another simply called it Thanks Day, which critics found too vague.”

Hint: Use "Another idea was" and "was not clear enough".

3. “The final law avoids that trap by asking citizens to thank one another.”

Hint: Start with "In the end" and use "each other" and "so it does not".

Summary

Summarize the passage in about 50 words.



Debate & Opinion Essay

Prepare for a debate. Then write your opinion (100–150 words).

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Motion: Labor Thanksgiving Day was the best name for November 23.

FOR 賛成

- Thanks Day was too vague, and the word labor tells people clearly what to be grateful for.
- The name removes the colors of State Shinto, so it fits the rule that religion and the state are separate.
- The law asks citizens to thank one another, so the name does not only praise one group, and anyone who works can share it.

Add your own reason:

AGAINST 反対

- The name hides the day's real roots as a rice harvest rite, so many people enjoy it without knowing its history.
- Some lawmakers warned that thanking only workers could encourage class conflict, and people who do not have paid jobs may feel left out.
- A name about production or the harvest, such as New Grain Festival, would have kept a clearer link to the autumn season and to farmers.

Add your own reason:

Opinion	<i>I believe / I think that ...</i>
Reason 1	<i>First, ... For example, ...</i>
Reason 2	<i>Second, ... In fact, ...</i>
Counter	<i>Some people say ... However, ...</i>
Conclusion	<i>In conclusion, ...</i>